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Advancement of women

Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/136, reviews the activities undertaken by Member States and United Nations entities to empower rural women and improve their situation and contains recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 62/136 on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas, the General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General report on the implementation of that resolution, addressing different aspects of the empowerment of rural women. In response to that request, the present report summarizes actions taken by Member States[1] and United Nations entities[2] to improve the situation of rural women and support their empowerment. The report contains recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

II. Background

2. Despite the increasing extent and importance of urban areas, more than half of the world's population, including the overwhelming majority of poor women and men, live in rural areas.[3] Around 56 per cent of the population in the less developed countries and 72 per cent of the population in the least developed countries live in rural areas.[4]

3. Rural areas in most regions of the world are furthest from achieving the Millennium Development Goals.[5] At the 2008 high-level segment thematic debate of the Economic and Social Council on rural development it was recognized that investment in sustainable land management and agriculture in developing countries has been neglected for decades. Only 4 per cent of global official development assistance (ODA) is directed to agriculture, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, total Government spending on farming is also just 4 per cent.[6]

4. Women play a significant role in remunerated and non-remunerated work in rural areas, however, despite their critical input in supplying a large proportion of the agricultural labour in many parts of the world, in some cases producing up to 80 per cent of food crops,[7] women continue to have less access to financial, physical and social assets in comparison to men. They have less voice in public decision-

[1] Algeria, Argentina, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bahrain, Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Chile, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Greece, Jamaica, Japan, Malawi, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, the Russian Federation, Spain, the Slovak Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam and Yemen.

[2] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Human Rights Council, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), World Health Organization (WHO) and World Food Programme (WFP).

[3] Valdes, A. and Others (2009), "A profile of the rural poor", background paper for IFAD, *Rural Poverty Report 2009*, Rome.

[4] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2008), *World Urbanization Prospects*, New York.

[5] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2008), *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008*, New York.

[6] Economic and Social Council, 2008 high-level segment, thematic debate on rural development, issues note for round table 2, "Harnessing the current boom in agricultural commodities for poverty eradication and sustainable development: the case of small-scale farmers".

[7] FAO (2007), "Women and Food Security", Rome.

making and fewer opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills.[8] In rural areas, some 200 million people, nearly 20 per cent of the world's poor, have insufficient access to land to sustain their livelihoods.[9] Women constitute up to 70 per cent of the agricultural labour force, but most do not own or control any land. Rural women own less than 10 per cent of property in the developed world, and 2 per cent in the developing world.[9] It is estimated that women in Africa receive less than 10 per cent of all credit going to small farmers and only 1 per cent of the total credit going to the agricultural sector.[10]

5. The current global environment poses significant challenges to the situation of rural women. The inequalities and discrimination faced by rural women are exacerbated by the confluence of crises: the financial and economic crisis, the threat of climate change, and the fuel and food crises. The recessionary environment is likely to increase existing gender inequalities because women tend to receive lower unemployment and social security benefits and incur increased responsibility for household caregiving. In times of crises, women also take on additional responsibilities to provide non-market substitutes for market goods that their families are no longer able to afford.[11] Owing to climate variability, agricultural production is expected to fall in both tropical and in most temperate regions, with a direct negative effect on agriculture where women represent a large part of the workforce.[12] Sharp increases in food and fuel prices over the past few years have eroded the purchasing power of poor households, especially female headed households, which are the poorest of all. The food and fuel crises have raised serious concerns about food insecurity and malnutrition in many countries, which threaten the well-being and health of poor rural women and their families.[13]

6. Given the central economic and social role of women in rural areas, policies that enhance gender equality and women's empowerment are crucial for rural development, poverty reduction and economic growth.[14] At the same time, policies and strategies on agricultural and rural development, poverty reduction and economic growth must give explicit attention to gender equality and the contributions, priorities and needs of rural women.

III. Attention to rural women in intergovernmental processes

7. Since 2007, international intergovernmental processes have addressed issues of relevance to rural women. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly in 2007 (see resolution 61/295,

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[8] IFAD, FAO and the World Bank (2008), *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook*, Washington, D.C.

[9] United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the Global Land Tool Network (2008), "Secure land rights for all", Nairobi.

[10] International Development Association (ODA) (2008), "Gender: Working Towards Greater Equality", Washington, D.C., World Bank.

[11] E/CN.5/2009/CRP.2.

[12] IFAD (2008), "Enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty: meeting the challenge by delivering results: IFAD 2010-2012", Rome, Consultation on the eighth replenishment of IFAD's resources, second session, REPL.VIII/2/R.2.

[13] World Bank, FAO and IFAD (2009), Food, fuel and financial crises, International Expert Consultation Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook: from Knowledge to Action, 16 and 17 March 2009, Washington, D.C.

[14] See E/2009/72.

annex), recognized the human rights of the world's nearly 400 million indigenous peoples and called upon Member States to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination (see articles 21 and 22).

8. In 2008, the outcome document of the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus (resolution 63/239, annex) recognized the necessity for a financial infrastructure that provides access to a variety of sustainable products and services for micro-, small- and medium-sized businesses, with particular emphasis on women, rural populations and the poor. The need for increased resources to provide universal access to basic economic and social infrastructure and inclusive social services, including capacity-building, placing special attention on women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities in order to enhance their social protection, was also recognized.

9. The General Assembly has addressed the situation of rural women in a number of other resolutions, in which it has emphasized the extreme vulnerability of this group as a result of the global economic downturn and stressed the importance of sound gender-sensitive agricultural policies and strategies. In order to accelerate progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, in its resolution 62/206 the Assembly urged multilateral donors and international financial institutions to review and implement policies to support national efforts to ensure that a higher proportion of resources reach women, in particular in rural and remote areas.

10. In its resolution 62/190, the General Assembly reaffirmed that agriculture plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of a growing global population and that it is inextricably linked to poverty eradication, especially in developing countries, and called for an enhanced role for women at all levels and in all aspects of rural development, agriculture, nutrition and food security. The importance of sustainable and gender-sensitive agricultural policies as tools for promoting land and agrarian reform, rural credit and insurance and technical assistance, as well as other measures to achieve food security and rural development, was recognized in Assembly resolution 63/187. In its resolution 63/229, the Assembly called upon Member States and the United Nations system to fully maximize the role of microfinance instruments, including microcredit for poverty eradication, in particular for the empowerment of women and rural populations.

11. In its resolutions 62/138, 62/140 and 63/158, the General Assembly called upon Member States and the United Nations system to strengthen the capacity of health systems to provide family planning, prenatal care, skilled birth attendants, emergency obstetric care and post-partum care to young women and girls, including those living in poverty and in underserved rural areas where obstetric fistula is common. Incentives to attract qualified health professionals to rural areas and provision of means of transportation to enable women and girls to access obstetric care were also called for.

12. The ministerial declaration of the 2008 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council, entitled, "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development", reiterated the urgency of accelerating progress in the implementation of the priorities for action in water, sanitation and human settlements and urged the adoption of gender-sensitive

policies and the implementation of laws that guarantee well-defined and enforceable land and water-use rights and promote legal security of tenure.

13. The agreed conclusions of the fifty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2008), entitled, "Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women", called for active labour market policies for the full participation of women in all international and national development and poverty eradication strategies and the creation of more and better jobs for women in both urban and rural areas. In the agreed conclusions of the fifty-third session of the Commission (2009), entitled, "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS", Governments and the United Nations system were urged to increase the availability, access to and use of critical public infrastructure, such as transportation, the provision of a safe, reliable and clean water supply, sanitation, energy, telecommunications and affordable housing programmes, in particular in poverty-stricken and rural areas. The Commission called for strengthening accessibility of public health care services and community-based health services specifically related to the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, including for people with disabilities, and an increase in the number of professional health-care providers, especially in rural areas.

14. At its seventh session in 2008, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recognized the crucial role of indigenous women in developing mitigation and adaptation measures on climate change and recommended the development of mechanisms for indigenous peoples' participation, in particular indigenous women and youth, in all aspects of the international dialogue on climate change.[15] At its eighth session in 2009, the Permanent Forum called upon States to ensure the application of culturally relevant, gender-balanced and gender-based analysis as well as gender-responsive budgeting in all projects as critical elements of economic and social development. The Forum urged States to address the situation of indigenous peoples who are forced to migrate or are displaced by violent conflicts, with a particular focus on indigenous women.[16]

15. A number of other outcomes on rural development, poverty eradication and climate change, while highly relevant to the situation of rural women, did not give specific attention to their contributions, priorities and needs.[17]

16. In its resolution 62/136, the General Assembly established an annual International Day of Rural Women on 15 October, which was observed for the first time in 2008. Events were held at United Nations Headquarters and at national and regional levels. In his message, the Secretary-General urged all countries to put the needs of rural women at the top of the global agenda so as to pave the way for a more secure global future.[18]

[15] See E/2008/43-E/C.19/2008/13.

[16] See E/2009/43-E/C.19/2009/14.

[17] See resolution 63/152 and the declaration of the High-level Conference on World Food Security: The Challenge of Climate Change and Bioenergy, Rome, 3-5 June 2008.

[18] WomenWatch (2008), International Day of Rural Women, 15 October 2008: see http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/idrw/.

IV. Action at the national level

17. In response to General Assembly resolution 62/136, Member States have taken a number of measures to empower rural women and ensure that attention is given to their priorities, needs and contributions. United Nations entities continued to support these efforts at nation level.

18. In its resolution 62/136, the General Assembly urged Member States to promote consultation with and participation of rural women, including indigenous women and women with disabilities, through their organizations and networks, in the design, development and implementation of gender equality and rural development programmes and strategies.

19. In a number of Member States (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Jamaica, Morocco and Trinidad and Tobago) rural women's organizations were involved in the drafting of national action plans on gender equality. In other countries, the situation of rural women was taken into account in gender equality policies and plans. The gender action plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, called on the Agency for Gender Equality to develop a strategy to increase the number of rural women and Roma women in decision-making at the local level. The action plan for the advancement of women (2006-2010) of Burkina Faso defined a strategy to increase rural women's participation in decision-making bodies at all levels, including through strengthening opportunities for women candidates in rural areas.

20. In its resolution 62/136, the General Assembly urged Member States to integrate a gender perspective into the design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of development policies and programmes, paying increased attention to the needs of rural women to ensure they benefit from policies and programmes.

21. Efforts to integrate gender perspectives into rural development policies were reported in a number of countries (Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, Cyprus, the Slovak Republic and Spain). The Council of Ministers in Spain, adopted the Equal Opportunities Plan in the Rural Areas (2007-2013), which promotes the economic empowerment of women as one of its key objectives. In Chile, the Ministry of Agriculture created a Commission for Equal Opportunities within the ministry. Through its socio-economic and gender analysis programme, FAO assisted over 20 countries to develop gender-sensitive national action plans for the rural sector and trained nearly 4,500 development specialists in over 90 countries in mainstreaming gender perspectives in development programmes and projects. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) promoted the incorporation of rural women's perspectives in economic policies in Central America, a region where women's presence in agro-industry for exports is considerable.

A. Promoting the participation of rural women in decision-making

22. The General Assembly, in its resolution 62/136, urged Member States to pursue the political and socio-economic empowerment of rural women and support their full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels.

23. Although the critical role of rural women, in particular in community-level projects and local institutions, is increasingly recognized, rural women continue to

face constraints to their participation in decision-making processes.[19] Temporary quotas and the trend toward decentralization provide opportunities for increased participation of women in local decision-making and representation on community development groups, water user's associations and self-help groups.[20]

24. Member States reported on the status of women's representation in local government and on specific measures to strengthen the role of women in decision-making processes. For example, the Slovak Republic reported 20.7 per cent of mayors and magistrates at the local level are women. In 2006, 3,000 rural women were elected to the parish boards in Ecuador, the lowest level of local government. These women were organized in a national association that works to strengthen women's leadership and mainstream gender equality into local public policies. The Government of the Czech Republic, in collaboration with the non-governmental organization "Gender Studies", implemented an annual awareness-raising campaign aimed at achieving gender equality in local administrations, including small municipalities in rural areas.

25. Through information campaigns and training, China increased women's participation in village neighbourhood committees and increased the number of women elected as village chiefs. In Japan, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries established annual plans to promote the participation of women in decision-making processes. In 2008, it issued directives to agricultural organizations such as the National Chamber of Agriculture and the Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives to promote women's participation in decision-making processes and structures.

26. In many countries, civil society organizations advocated increased participation of rural women in decision-making at all levels. For example, the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan and the Trinidad and Tobago Federation of Women promoted the participation of rural women in the development of legislation, and provided research and information on rural women's rights.

27. A number of initiatives to improve rural women's access to decision-making were reported by United Nations entities. UNFPA involved rural women and their civil society representatives as key stakeholders in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes on sexual and reproductive health programmes and on ending all forms of violence against women. The Fund also advocated the involvement of rural women in decision-making at the family and community levels. WFP promoted leadership training for women and reported that 266,000 women held leadership positions in various food-related committees established in 2008. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) promoted the participation of women in management and leadership committees in all operations, including in rural camp settings and return areas, and provided training in leadership skills and women's rights education. In Nepal every household in refugee camps was allocated two voting rights, one for a woman and one for a man. As result, almost half the members of camp management committees were women.

[19] United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women (2008), *Women 2000 and beyond: Rural women in a changing world: Opportunities and challenges*, New York.

[20] Beall, J. (2005), Decentralizing Government and Centralizing Gender in Southern Africa: Lessons from the South African Experience, Geneva, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

B. Strengthening the economic empowerment of rural women

28. The General Assembly, in its resolution 62/136, also urged Member States to expand non-agricultural employment opportunities for women, thus improving their working conditions and increasing their access to productive resources, ensuring that women's unpaid work and contributions to on-farm and off-farm production are recognized and promoting programmes to enable rural women and men to reconcile their work and family responsibilities.

29. Globally, women's participation in the labour force is around 40 per cent of all paid employment outside agriculture. There are, however, significant regional differences, particularly in rural areas.[21] Barriers to equal access to non-agricultural employment for rural women include the lack of adequate education, transportation facilities and child-care services, as well as constraints imposed by their unequal care and household responsibilities. Socio-cultural attitudes can be especially restrictive for women in small and remote villages, particularly widows and wives of migrant workers.[22]

30. The promotion of non-agricultural employment for women is critical for ensuring sustainable livelihoods and food security in rural areas. A number of Member States have taken measures to enhance women's access to microfinance, including microcredit (Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Malawi, Spain, Turkey and Uzbekistan). For example, China and Spain have promoted microcredit and management training projects to support rural women in starting their own businesses and Brazil has allocated credits to 58,000 rural women workers for the period from 2008 to 2011. The fund "Forum of culture and art" in Uzbekistan has established a programme to support small businesses run by women farmers and provided grants to 60 women entrepreneurs. In Turkey, financial support has also been offered to cooperatives in rural areas, giving priority to those whose members are women or to families headed by women. IOM has implemented a small business training and microcredit revolving fund for land mine survivors in Azerbaijan, providing microcredit assistance to women who are family members of land mine victims.

31. Member States have taken other steps to enhance women's economic activities. To address the constraints to women's employment posed by women's unequal responsibility for care-giving, Greece has organized seasonal kindergartens during the peak periods of rural activities. In Serbia, UNDP has supported a project on women and rural development, which resulted in the creation of a database of successful individuals and groups in small-scale economic activities in rural areas.

32. A number of Member States took steps to promote the marketing of the products of women entrepreneurs and to ensure the inclusion of women entrepreneurs in agricultural and trade fairs (Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, El Salvador, Greece and Malawi). Support for the marketing and promotion of women's production of handmade traditional costumes, honey products and

[21] 2008 high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals, background note by the Secretary-General, New York.

[22] Alimdjanova, D. (2009), "Gender aspects of agricultural and rural employment: application for Uzbekistan", workshop on gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty, Rome, FAO, IFAD, ILO, 31 March-2 April 2009.

traditional rugs was provided by the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through its rural development fund and other microfinance institutions, rural women in Malawi have been provided with financial assistance and support in marketing their processed products.

33. In September 2008, Greece promoted the first national exhibition of traditional products from women cooperatives. The Government of Brazil supported the participation of women's organizations in national family agriculture and land reform fairs, with the result that women's participation in the fairs increased from 14 to 23 per cent. The guide for exhibitors, prepared by the Ministry of Agrarian Development, recommended that at least 30 per cent of enterprises should be owned or managed by women.

34. Initiatives were taken in a number of Member States to address the constraints faced by rural women in terms of their unequal access to resources and assets, including land, which are critical for their economic empowerment (Brazil, Burkina Faso and El Salvador). To guarantee the mandatory inclusion of both women and men in land registers, irrespective of their civil status, Brazil reformed the process of registration. The classification system for beneficiary families of land reform gives priority to female-headed households. In 2008, 920 rural women in El Salvador were provided with land certificates. In Burkina Faso, a national policy on land tenure security was established in rural areas to ensure land rights for both women and men.

35. Support to national efforts to increase land tenure security for rural women was also reported by United Nations entities. For example, in Tajikistan, UNIFEM and FAO trained 654 specialists from the land agency, the women's committee, non-governmental organizations and informal community groups active in rural areas on the gender perspective of land reform, contributed to the development of a gender-sensitive land reform strategy and issued the document "Using Human Rights Treaties to Protect Rural Women's Rights to Land".

36. Capacity-building on project development and management and resource mobilization are essential for rural women's economic empowerment. A number of Member States reported on capacity-building initiatives aiming at enhancing the economic opportunities for rural women (Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Jamaica, Japan, the Russian Federation, the Slovak Republic and Trinidad and Tobago). Training courses on processing technology and farm management were targeted at women farmers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Japan and Trinidad and Tobago. Formal education is another entry point for enhancing the role of rural women in the agricultural sector. The Russian Federation reported that 46.6 per cent of students in agricultural schools were women. In 2008, WFP facilitated the participation of 935,000 women in food-for-training activities on income generation.

37. Partnerships with civil society to enhance women's economic empowerment were also reported by Member States. The Slovak Republic worked with the Professional Rural Women's Association to support initiatives focused on employment and information networks in rural areas. Through a consultative process with rural women's organizations, Brazil developed culture- and race-sensitive guidelines to incorporate gender equality perspectives into land reform. Burkina Faso provided funds for the construction of women's centres in 45 provinces to create space for meetings and training opportunities. With the support of the African Development Bank, the Government provided bicycles and carts to enhance the mobility of rural

women. Through the Dimitra project, "Rural women and development", FAO facilitated the access of rural women's organizations to information and communications technology to enable them to establish partnerships with other civil society organizations to exchange information on a range of issues, including agriculture, health and education.

38. Initiatives were also taken to enhance women's entrepreneurship in rural areas through bilateral development cooperation programmes in a number of countries. Belgium contributed funding to the FAO programme on "Knowledge management and gender, 2009-2012", which focuses on the exchange and application of agricultural information in rural communities, including among women. The European Commission provided technical assistance on gender equality and entrepreneurship in rural areas in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

39. A number of publications related to rural women's economic empowerment were produced by United Nations entities. In 2008, IFAD published *Gender and non-timber forest products: promoting food security and economic empowerment*, a guide to creating opportunities for increased involvement of women in non-timber forest production. In 2009, IFAD, FAO and the World Bank published the *Gender in Agriculture* Sourcebook,[6] a comprehensive tool for policymaking to improve the livelihoods of women in poor rural communities. In 2009, a report by ECLAC and FAO on the employment of rural women in Latin America[23] analysed the patterns of integration of rural women into the labour force, and identified persistent constraints related to lack of quality employment opportunities for rural women.

C. Providing health-care services

40. In its resolution 62/136, the General Assembly addressed the specific health needs of rural women and called for concrete measures to enhance their access to the highest attainable standards of health for women in rural areas, including through sexual and reproductive health services such as pre- and post-natal health care, emergency obstetric care, family planning information and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

41. Reproductive health care remains inadequate in rural areas in many countries, with the presence of skilled birth attendants at births lower in rural than in urban areas in every region. Millennium Development Goal 5 is the goal where least progress has been made. According to WHO, less than two thirds of women in developing countries receive assistance from skilled health workers when giving birth.[24] Maternal mortality remains high in poor and rural areas, with the highest rates in sub-Saharan Africa.[25] The absence of health-care facilities at community level, lack of skilled staff at the primary-care level and the high cost of transportation and care are some of the main barriers that prevent rural women from enjoying good health, especially in developing countries.[19]

[23] Ballara, M. and S. Parada (2009), *El empleo de las mujeres rurales: Lo que dicen las cifras*, Rome, FAO and ECLAC.

[24] WHO (2008), fact sheet on maternal mortality, Geneva (WHO/MPS/08.12).

[25] UNFPA (2009), Safe motherhood: Skilled attendance at birth, *Population Issues*, New York (see http://www.unfpa.org/mothers/skilled_att.htm).

42. In many countries, women and adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS as a result of biological conditions, economic and social inequalities and discrimination and stereotypical attitudes and behaviours that place them in a subordinate position.[26] Women and girls are at increased risk of contracting HIV as a result of sexual violence, both inside and outside the home, and during armed conflict and its aftermath. In many countries, rural women and girls are disproportionately affected. Factors such as poverty, illiteracy and gender-based power imbalances within families and communities restrict women's access to preventive care, drugs and treatment.[27] Where women do not have legal rights to land and property, they face the loss of property and income when husbands die. As family members become ill, women take on increased farm and off-farm work as well as additional responsibilities for caregiving. Grandmothers often care for AIDS orphans when the children's parents become ill and die. Children, especially girls, may be taken out of school because of lack of resources and the need for additional labour.[28] The associated high costs are further aggravated by poor development of rural health infrastructure, which increases the vulnerability of poor rural women.[19]

43. Examples of measures taken to improve the provision of gender-sensitive health services in rural areas were reported. Some countries provided free public health services in rural areas (Cyprus, Malawi and Malta) and efforts were made to improve the health infrastructure and expand health facilities in rural areas (El Salvador, Jamaica, the Russian Federation and Viet Nam). In Viet Nam, a project on improving water, sanitation and health infrastructures sponsored by the World Bank and the Danish Government was implemented in four provinces in rural areas. UNDP supported Kyrgyzstan in implementing the project "First interactive e-health services in the Kyrgyz Republic" with the goal of expanding rural women's access to medical services through new information and communications technology.

44. Free access to reproductive health care was provided in a number of countries (Ecuador and Mexico). Mobile services in some countries provided comprehensive family planning programmes, including gynaecological examinations, pap smears and mammograms (Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Ecuador, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Yemen). Burkina Faso implemented a system of cost-sharing for delivery, obstetric and neonatal care to increase women's use of health services.

45. In recognition of the critical role of traditional midwives, Member States, with the support of United Nations entities, have created midwifery training centres. Through its national policy on health and sexual and reproductive rights, Ecuador allocated resources to enhance the role of traditional rural midwives. Mexico reported the certification of 558 traditional midwives during the period 2007-2008. In collaboration with the International Confederation of Midwives, UNFPA supported increased national investments in midwifery in more than 30 countries in order to create safer conditions for rural women before and during delivery.

46. Measures were taken in some countries to train medical staff to work in rural areas and to educate rural women on issues of reproductive health (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Japan and Turkey). In India, UNFPA supported the national rural

[26] E/CN.4/2004/66.

[27] E/CN.4/2005/72 and Corr.1.

[28] UNAIDS, Gender & AIDS; fact sheet on rural HIV (see http://data.unaids.org/Topics/Gender/ruralhivaids_en.pdf).

health mission in piloting innovative approaches on reproductive health with community involvement. WHO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank supported programmes on women's health in rural areas of Uzbekistan, focusing on safe pregnancy and strengthening the efficiency of prenatal assistance.

47. UNFPA continued to work with community and religious leaders, traditional birth attendants, radio stations, influential public figures and policymakers to increase awareness of the needs of women, particularly pregnant women, in rural areas, and to mobilize support for reproductive health and HIV prevention. Through its campaign to end fistula, UNFPA supported fistula survivors in 13 countries, empowering them to sensitize communities, provide peer support to women living with fistula and act as advocates for improved maternal health.

48. Awareness-raising measures to assist women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, involving a range of stakeholders, were reported by some Member States (Burkina Faso, Czech Republic and Malawi). The Bureau of Women's Affairs of the Czech Republic promoted awareness-raising sessions on HIV/AIDS through a community outreach programme, benefiting 1,729 rural women. FAO undertook a series of HIV/AIDS communications campaigns, including through its Special Programme for Food Security, targeting vulnerable groups such as women and children in low-income food-deficit countries. WFP targeted pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls through awareness-raising on nutrition, health-care practices and HIV prevention. In South Africa, an IOM survey in Limpopo Province revealed that gender inequality was a major factor in HIV vulnerability among farm workers, in particular female employees under 30 years of age. UNHCR reported that women and men refugees had equal access to HIV/AIDS antiretroviral treatment in 85 per cent of its operations.

D. Eliminating violence against women in rural areas

49. In its resolution 62/136, the General Assembly also urged Member States and the United Nations system to create an environment in rural areas that does not tolerate violations of women's rights, including domestic violence, sexual violence and all other forms of gender-based violence.

50. Rural women are particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse as a result of isolation and lack of social support; community attitudes that tolerate and legitimize male violence; economic dependence; and inaccessibility of law enforcement and protection services.[29] Access to services, such as women's shelters or domestic violence programmes that are far from rural communities is difficult or impossible for women when public transportation is limited or non-existent.[30]

51. A range of measures to eliminate violence against women, including targeted legislation, national strategies and support services, were reported but little information was provided on how these measures specifically addressed the

[29] FAO, "AIDS — a threat to rural Africa: rural women carry family burdens", *Focus* (http://www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/aids/aids3-e.htm).

[30] Chamberlain, L. (2002), Domestic Violence: A Primary Care Issue for Rural Women, "The Network News", Washington, D.C., National Women's Health Network.

priorities and needs of rural women. Some countries reported, however, on measures explicitly targeting rural women, including through legislation and programmes. The Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina established a multi-year (2009-2011) strategy focused on preventing and eliminating violence against women, including rural women. Morocco created a decentralized programme to end violence against women and girls that covers rural areas.

52. Member States reported measures to bring victim support services closer to rural women and to establish alliances with community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and non-governmental organizations to provide services for rural women victims of violence, including psychological, social and legal counselling and temporary shelters (El Salvador and Malawi).

53. Training on violence against women has been provided for health personnel. The General Directorate on the Status of Women and the Ministry of Health in Spain, for example, signed a protocol in 2008 to give in-service training to health personnel in providing primary, secondary and tertiary care services to women victims of violence, including rural women.

54. Awareness-raising programmes on the prevalence of violence against women were organized in local communities through social leaders, local councils, non-governmental organizations and local authorities (Jamaica, Spain and Yemen). In 2008, the Bureau of Women's Affairs of Jamaica conducted 22 workshops on gender-based violence, with 2,246 participants in rural communities, 77 per cent of whom were women. Workshops and discussions on the implementation of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belen do Para) were also organized for resident magistrates. In 2007, Spain distributed 300,000 awareness-raising brochures on violence against women in rural areas.

55. Factors such as race, ethnicity and class can exacerbate women's vulnerability to violence. Some countries have developed policies that explicitly take these factors into consideration. The Brazilian national pact to fight violence against women, launched in 2007, was the outcome of a participative process involving legislators and a consortium of eight non-governmental organizations. It gives special attention to black and indigenous women and to women in rural areas. The pact promoted the creation of the forum to draft policies to fight violence against women in rural and forest areas. The forum, which includes representatives from ministries, special secretariats and civil society organizations, spearheaded an awareness-raising media campaign on domestic violence.

56. Female genital mutilation remains a widespread practice in rural areas in many developing countries.[31] Member States, with the support of United Nations entities, have undertaken a number of measures to promote the elimination of this harmful practice.[32] Burkina Faso has implemented an action plan, "Zero tolerance for female genital mutilation 2008-2012", which incorporates advocacy activities on the rights of women, including those living in rural and remote areas. In 2008, WHO has coordinated the publication of an inter-agency statement on the elimination of female genital mutilation, signed by 10 United Nation agencies, which calls upon

[31] UNFPA and others (2008), *Eliminating female genital mutilation: an inter-agency statement*, Geneva, WHO.

[32] WHO (2008), "Female genital mutilation", Fact sheet No. 241.

Member States to prevent female genital mutilation; to promote its abandonment; to respond to its consequences; to hold those who perpetrate it criminally responsible for inflicting harm on girls and women; to support and enhance community-based efforts; and to develop and promote guidelines for care of victims.

57. Other initiatives by United Nations entities to support efforts at the national level to eliminate violence against rural women were reported. WFP provided food rations to hospitalized victims of sexual abuse and through its food-for-training and food-for-work programmes it supported rural women survivors to become economically independent. UNFPA provided support to Governments, including through technical assistance, advocacy and capacity development, on prevention and response to violence against women living in both rural and urban areas. UNFPA issued a strategy and framework of action for addressing gender-based violence: 2008-2011. IOM supported Member States in promoting safe migration for women in rural areas. In Viet Nam, an IOM-supported vocational training centre offered training to women from rural areas at high risk of being trafficked. Two of the centres facilitated the return and reintegration of victims of trafficking, including rural women.

E. Meeting the needs of women in vulnerable situations

1. Rural women with disabilities

58. In its resolution 62/136, the General Assembly also called upon Member States and United Nations entities to promote consultation with, and participation of, women with disabilities living in rural areas, through their organizations and networks, in the design, development and implementation of gender equality and rural development programmes and strategies.

59. Most women with disabilities in rural areas in developing countries face substantial barriers to independent living, including vulnerability to poverty and social isolation, limited access to employment and productive resources and lack of access to adequate health-care infrastructure and other services, including transportation.[33]

60. Member States reported on specific measures to address the situation of women with disabilities. Japan promoted a "farms for liveable lives" initiative and applied barrier-free design to agricultural facilities. In 2007-2008, Spain took specific measures to enhance rural women's participation in the labour market, with a focus on those over 45 years of age, women with disabilities and women without formal education. In the Czech Republic, the adoption of the act on social services in 2007 was intended to enhance the quality of social services and make them accessible to all people with disabilities, irrespective of where they live. WHO reported on the development of technical guidelines on community-based rehabilitation to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities, with a specific focus on women and girls.

[33] Rousso, H. (2003), "Education for All: a gender and disability perspective", background paper prepared for the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report: The Leap to Equality*, Paris, UNESCO.

2. Indigenous women

61. In recognition of the critical role of indigenous women in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty, in its resolution 62/136, the General Assembly called upon Member States and United Nations entities to ensure that the perspectives of indigenous women are taken into account and that they participate in the design, development and implementation of gender equality and rural development programmes and strategies.

62. Indigenous women often face multiple discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and gender.[34] In many rural areas, indigenous women depend on access to natural resources, and the depletion of ecosystems has thus had a profound impact on their livelihoods. It is important to recognize that indigenous women play a critical role in rural development, in particular in the sustainable management of resources and the preservation of biological diversity. It is also important to promote their full participation at all levels of decision-making.[35]

63. A range of measures have been undertaken at the national level to protect indigenous women's rights. In Mexico, for example, the National pro-gender equality programme 2007-2012 includes a commitment to reduce inequalities faced by indigenous women. The League of Displaced Women in Colombia, an organization of 300 Afro-Colombian and indigenous women, with the support of UNHCR, sought restitution for human rights violations. UNIFEM's regional programme "Working against ethnic and gender-based discrimination: for the effective exercise of Latin American indigenous women's rights", supported three pilot initiatives to improve indigenous women's access to justice. In Ecuador, UNIFEM supported the reform of the ancestral indigenous justice system in 43 Kichwa communities to strengthen women's rights and eliminate violence and economic discrimination against them. UNIFEM supported indigenous women's associations in Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco and Suriname to advocate for land rights.

64. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) gave awards to two outstanding health projects on domestic violence and culturally appropriate care for indigenous women. IOM, through its projects in Costa Rica, Panama and Viet Nam, actively supported the empowerment of indigenous women, promoted their access to health services and training programmes on women's rights and enhanced the organization of indigenous women.

65. UNFPA contributed to the strengthening of indigenous and ethnic minority organizations and networks in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mexico, Panama and Viet Nam. The Fund supported the Women's Union and the Farmers' Union, two key organizations active in ethnic minority regions in Viet Nam, to integrate health education activities into income-generating initiatives. UNFPA also worked with the Ministry of Health in Mexico to develop strategies for the empowerment of indigenous women. In Panama, UNFPA facilitated the participation of the national coordinator for indigenous women

[34] ILO (2007), "Indigenous women overcome multiple obstacles", Geneva.

[35] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2007), Indigenous Women and the United Nations system: good practices and lessons learned, New York.

(coordinadora de mujeres indígenas de Panamá) and the Ngöbe Women's Association in organizing the first International Forum of Indigenous Women.

3. Older rural women

66. In its resolution 62/136, the General Assembly also called upon Member States and United Nations entities to ensure that the rights of older women in rural areas are taken into account with regard to their equal access to basic social services, appropriate social protection/social security measures and economic resources, as well as their empowerment through access to financial services and infrastructure.

67. Many older women in developing countries live in extreme poverty and exclusion, especially in rural areas. Poor economic and health conditions, changes in traditional family support structures and elder-abuse increase the vulnerability of women. In many countries, older women increasingly act as caregivers for their adult children infected with HIV/AIDS as well as for their orphaned grandchildren, despite the fact that they often face extreme poverty, isolation and abandonment.[36]

68. Social protection initiatives, such as cash transfers and agricultural input subsidy programmes targeted at older, vulnerable people, including women in the rural areas, were undertaken in some countries (Jamaica, Japan and Malawi). The National Council for Senior Citizens in Jamaica, for example, organized annual awareness-raising programmes specifically targeted at older women in rural areas. In order to secure a safe living environment for elderly women in rural areas, Japan distributed information on the national farmers' pension scheme and provided health-care services in rural villages.

69. UNFPA advocated the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, with a focus on promoting the quality of life of older persons, including women in rural areas. UNHCR introduced an "Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming" strategy to promote meaningful participation of women and men, including those based in and/or originating from rural areas, into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of its programmes and operations.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

70. **Member States and United Nations entities have taken measures to improve the situation of rural women with regard to their participation in public life, opportunities for employment, access to and control over productive resources and access to health facilities and services for victims of violence. The needs, priorities and contributions of rural women continue, however, to be insufficiently addressed. Rural women's knowledge, experience and contributions should be taken into consideration in research, data collection, policy development, resource allocation and programmes in all areas of sustainable development.**

71. **The persistent inequalities and discrimination faced by rural women pose significant challenges to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The adverse**

[36] UNFPA (2002), *Situations and voices: The Older Poor and Excluded in South Africa and India*, Population and Development Strategies Series, No. 2, New York.

impacts of the current multiple global crises (food and energy crises, climate change and economic and financial crises), affect rural women, particularly poor women, disproportionately. While there is a growing recognition that rural women, including indigenous women, can be critical agents in the adaptation and mitigation responses to current crises, little has been done to mobilize and empower them to contribute effectively.

72. **The improvement of the situation of rural women requires the promotion of non-agricultural employment and full access to productive resources. Other critical elements include strengthening the responsiveness of the public health system to the needs of rural women and enhanced measures to prevent violence against women and support victims/survivors. Adequate responses to the current crises require both short-term action to reduce immediate vulnerabilities of rural women and long-term measures to promote gender-sensitive rural development policies that contribute to the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment and sustainable development.**

73. **Governments, United Nations entities and all other relevant stakeholders should support legislation, policies and programmes that strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women in rural areas. Specific interventions could include actions to:**

(a) **Ensure systematic attention to rural women's needs, priorities and contributions, including through enhanced consultation and full participation in the development, implementation and monitoring of both gender equality policies and action plans and rural development policies and programmes, including agricultural policies and poverty reduction strategies;**

(b) **Adopt appropriate measures to identify and address the negative impacts of the current global crises (food and energy, climate change and financial and economic crises) on women in rural areas;**

(c) **Design stimulus packages in response to the financial and economic crisis that provide gender-sensitive investments in both physical and social infrastructure and in employment opportunities, taking into account the specific needs, priorities and contributions of rural women;**

(d) **Promote rural women's participation in decision-making at all levels, including through temporary special measures, and support policies and mechanisms that create an enabling environment for rural women's organizations and networks, including self-help groups, workers' organizations and cooperatives;**

(e) **Integrate the creation of non-agricultural employment opportunities for rural women into all national development strategies and poverty eradication strategies and increase women's access to financial resources, including credit;**

(f) **Strengthen efforts to protect the rights of and ensure decent work conditions for rural women workers in relation to, inter alia, working hours, conditions and wages, access to health-care services, childcare and breastfeeding facilities, and other social and economic benefits;**

(g) **Develop and expand the provision of quality and affordable public health-care services for rural areas, including sexual and reproductive health**

services, and ensure coverage of all women throughout the life cycle, particularly those living in poverty and in underserved rural areas, including older women, indigenous women and women living with disabilities and with HIV/AIDS;

(h) Strengthen measures, including increased financial resources, to accelerate progress towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 5 on improving maternal health through increasing access in rural areas to quality and affordable prenatal care, obstetric care, skilled birth attendants and post-partum care;

(i) Intensify measures to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against rural women, including the implementation of laws, the prosecution of perpetrators, the provision of services, and the implementation of awareness-raising campaigns;

(j) Promote the rights of women and girls with disabilities in rural areas, including by ensuring their equal access to productive employment and decent work, economic and financial resources and disability-sensitive infrastructure and services, in particular in relation to health and education, as well as by ensuring that their priorities and needs are fully incorporated into policies and programmes, inter alia, through their participation in decision-making processes;

(k) Ensure that the rights of older women in rural areas are taken into account, including in relation to equal access to basic social services, appropriate social protection measures, and economic and financial resources;

(l) Promote legislative reforms to eliminate laws and practices that discriminate against indigenous women, including with regard to their access to and control over productive and economic resources and participation in decision-making processes;

(m) Increase the capacity of personnel working with national development strategies, rural development, agricultural development, poverty eradication and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals to identify and address the challenges and constraints facing rural women, including through training programmes and the development and dissemination of methodologies and tools;

(n) Improve monitoring of the impact of policies and programmes on women in rural areas, including through research and the systematic collection and use of sex-disaggregated data;

(o) Ensure that the empowerment of rural women, including indigenous women, is addressed during the 15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2010, and the 2010 annual ministerial review of the ECOSOC/Development Cooperation Forum focused on "Implementing the internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women".